



A Small Voice Podcast Instagram Takeover

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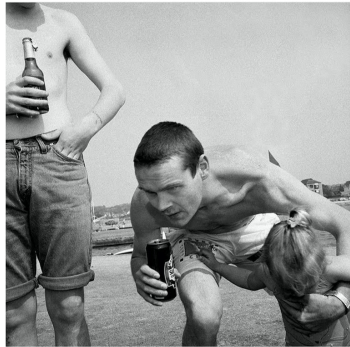
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1. I'm sitting in the back room, with birdsong and John Prine, working on pictures and drinking tea. Things feel still for a change, like there's enough time to figure things out, Sometimes it's easier to keep moving but let's see where things go. Over the next few days, I'll put up some work from a few series that became books, but other things too. The pictures included here today were from the wide edit that became 'No Pain Whatsoever'. After finishing The Close Season, I collaborated with Gosta Flemming on this. @flemminggosta publishes under the name "Journal" and has made some of the most beautiful Photobooks I know. Each seems to have its own settling point, there's no one style, no house design. Each is worked through until it achieves an undeniably clear and singular voice. And isn't that something to hope for? In a world where John Prine succumbs to the virus and politicians come back from the dead like it's the second coming, those people able to put the world into a shape I can feel, trust and believe in are all the more precious. John Prine could. Gosta can and I was honoured to work with him. He knows his music too.



2. On Saturday 15th April 1989, I was photographing a young football team and, as these things often played out, had found myself on a coach to Manchester to watch United play Derby. Not a journey I would have chosen myself, it remains my only visit to Old Trafford and would have been forgettable, had I not stood at half time watching the news starting to unfold just across the Pennines at Hillsborough in Sheffield. Eventually, 96 Liverpool fans died as a result of what happened there. Hundreds more were injured. There have been important accounts around what took place that day and the legacy of trauma and injustice that remains, not least by the brilliant criminologist Phil Scraton, whose persistence and dignity could guide us all, no matter what games we play. Life and death. Youth and frailty. Hope and despair. I never thought I'd make a football book, it seemed partisan, too easy to misinterpret, too straightforward, when most of the things that concern me might not give themselves up so easily in a book about a city and its obsessions. In 2014 the publisher Rudi Thoemmes asked me to start looking at what pictures of football I had. I went through pictures made since the 1980s and we made a book that still seems to make sense. Designed with a nod to the spirit of those childhood annuals that would bring dreams to my young life in the early 1970s, it was overpopulated, boisterous, mixing pictures from outside the stadia with pictures of our attempts to keep the flame lit in our more recent Birkenhead Park Friday kickabouts. Rudi said 'A Topical Times for these Times' was the worst title for a book that he ever agreed to publish, but I'm glad he relented. These are our times and they're not perfect either. Remember the 96, remember that truth will often come after the crowds have gone and today, 31 years on to the day from that day, as the sun shines just like it did on this quiet spring morning, that seems more important than ever.



3.

You can count the chairs in the St. Brides Soup Kitchen. You can count the paper napkins and sense how busy the evening will get when the doors finally open and the sisters beckon the hungry in. In 2000, working with the poet Colin Watts, I photographed the streets and interiors in the wedge of land between the Liverpool docks and its Chinatown. With churches that looked after the lost and found, tired warehouses let out to sign-writers, to joiners, taxi offices and the kinds of small firms that make small margins, it was a tide of what some now call enterprise. I tend to photograph those I recognise as my contemporaries. I'd worked in such places, used similar machines and I was aware that, whilst the shift to 'new professionals' housing and the nighttime economies seemed to be on a roll, it was little to do with me and my kind. Many of these men would find themselves - as their forced relocation would inevitably herald - in the final years of their labour. I was reminded of Primo Levi's 'The Wrench', in which Faouconnet recalled a father who died with a hammer in his hand - I've got one of them, too. It led to conversations in The Monroe pub about work and how to depict it - before they were interrupted each night by blue collar country from another Eagles cover band. Colin and I talked about Fred Voss's 'Goodstone' poems, written in the tyre factory where the time killing staggers echoed stories I'd heard from the men I knew in Cammell Lairds shipyard, just across the river from where I sat. Chauncey Hare's 'Interior America' primed a potential to make work photographs that showed what work did to us instead of settling for what it looked like. Some of these pictures were briefly exhibited in the area before the gallery itself shut down, another venture priced out of the district it had enriched in that age old dance - the renovation gentrification relocation two-step. I'm sure you know those moves. And somehow, whilst the warehouses have become 'buy to let' and the churches have become steak houses, the soup kitchen is still there. Sometimes some tides take longer to turn.



4.
 Friday, 17 April, lockdown. My friend Rob Jones tells me he runs the 'pub of dreams' and I believe him. In a former steel town in South Wales, he runs a haven in a Superpub ghetto with the best kept Taddy on tap. Joe Strummer drank there long before he formed The Clash and that's good enough for me. Over the years I've declined trips and refused invitations because they interrupted my all too rare chances of an hour in the Murenger— and why wouldn't I? When the conversation across the bar travels from John Berger to King Creosote to Robert McFarlane, to the Wild Places and all that could ever be politics, what could be better than finding yourself in a snug that's been shaped over centuries? It's not easy to find peace sometimes but it's there when you look for it and that's something to hold on to, however the talking turns. And it can turn - Scouse Mouse may drop in to unpack Jurgen's new plans; Rob might remind me he's followed Mick Head's music for a long long time and 'when you're up there, Ken, can we get him down here?' Rob, lad, I'm good -but I'm not that good! Each Friday, wherever I am, I might just think of that solace. I may be nodding along to labourers conversations as they put to rest the dramas of a working week in the Dee View, or sat somewhere in transit knowing there's more to life than this fresh hell. I know because I've seen it....But it's a lockdown, so I'll finish my day up with a pile of pictures I'm working through and be in the back room again by twilight. Prine, God rest, him will give way to Julia Jacklin or maybe even Gene Clark, the Byrd who couldn't fly... and if thoughts head that way, I'll imagine sitting in one of the Murenger booths with my notebook, trying to make sense of the week -of what I've seen, what I've heard and what I've felt...trusting that we'll soon get through this, or at least to a place where we can work out what we've just been through. It only takes an hour, away from all of this, in the Pub of Dreams.